

Geology department donation truly rocks

Children of longtime Chevron employee grant endowment

BY ROB MESZAROS

Contributing writer

If you're going to study geology, experts say the 100 miles surrounding Bakersfield is one of the premier areas on earth to do so.

"You see pretty much everything from ancient volcanoes, water and oil reservoirs, rivers, and fault lines," said CSUB geology professor Dirk Baron.

This notion rang true for longtime geologist and petroleum engineer Claude Fiddler, who served 32 years with Chevron, many of which were spent in Kern County.



Fiddler

"He loved going out into the field more than anything else," said daughter Linda Fiddler.

She recalls countless times when her father would load brother David and her up in the car and set out from their

Taft home to drive around the oil fields, Claude stopping to point out different rock formations and pumping units all the way.

His legacy and love for field work will be carried out thanks to a generous gift Linda and David recently gave to CSUB's geology department in the form of the Claude Fiddler Endowment.

"A lot of the things he did, he didn't do in his name," said David Fiddler. "We thought it would be nice to have something in my father's memory in the community."

Keeping true to Claude's passion, the \$100,000 endowment will be used solely to fund field research, a component of CSUB's geology department that is a highly important part of the curricula.

"For us, field experience and field work are essential," said Baron.

"But, we don't have a real good mechanism to fund them."

CSUB geology professor Jan Gillespie agrees and acknowledges that the department's field study fund has taken a big hit in recent years.

Gillespie said that one thing that had been done in the past was to bring geology students from Bakersfield College together with geology majors at CSUB and have them go out in the field and learn together.

CSUB STUDENTS SHARE INSIGHT INTO BENEFITS OF FIELD STUDIES

According to CSUB geology professor Dirk Baron, field research is an essential part of his department's learning process, one that inherently complements classroom learning.

The department has conducted numerous surveys of graduating seniors and alumni and there is a common theme that field experience is absolutely essential.

CSUB geology students Elizabeth Powers and Travis Aragon — who have each participated in numerous course-related field studies ranging from one to four days — agree that field experience has been invaluable.

"You can memorize information you are given in the classroom and still not have a good understanding of what is really going on," she said. "Field trips really bring it all together because you can actually see it — the fault, the fold, the changes in rock type or fossils in place."

Aragon is of the same mind, adding that while field studies aren't a replacement for classroom learning, they are the icing on the cake and oftentimes the "ah-ha!" moment in a geology class.

Many field locations also offer students the ability to collect samples and data, which can be applied to future research.

"In the field you can reach out and touch the rock or outcrop and walk around it, above it, below it and some-

times in it," said Powers. "You can't do that with a textbook or in a classroom."

Powers recalls her favorite trip, an excursion to the vast Mojave Desert near Baker to study the Pleistocene period — a time from approximately 2.5 million to 12,000 years ago that encompasses the ice ages. A group of about 500 geologists and students hiked all day, listened to lectures and looked at outcrops and maps. By nightfall, they camped in the middle of nowhere.

"It was great," recalls Powers. "Professors, students, USGS staff, professionals and researchers all come together to learn something new."

While field studies are an essential part of a student's success, they are also expensive.

Students do generally pay a nominal fee, but this only covers a portion of expenses, which include items like field instruments, vehicle rentals, park and campground fees, water, and other necessities.

Powers said that increasing fuel prices stifle distance travel and sometimes cuts trips short.

"It is really great that the Fiddler family has provided geology with a monetary gift just for field studies," said Powers. "This will have an enormous positive impact on geology students and our community."

— Rob Meszaros

FIDDLER: Many grads get work in oil industry

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“So many of the geology majors do their first two years at BC and then move over here. For a while, that was a nice way to link the two communities,” she said. “This gift may be a way for us to do that again.”

The endowment will also help the geology department send students to visit local oil companies to get an idea of what professional geologists do on a daily basis, in addition to going on location through the vast Kern County landscape to study its storied past, and support students who are doing field

work for their senior and graduate theses.

Many CSUB geology grads go on to work in the oil industry and executives often look to CSUB for their new pool of young talent.

“Chevron comes recruiting once a year in the department and one of the things they say is they like our students because they are well prepared, but also that they are happy here and tend to stay here,” said Baron.

“They bring in people from other parts of the country and they leave after a year or two.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE FIDDLER FAMILY

Claude Fiddler conducts field work in Alaska in 1959.

“We really should be educating our own to work in an industry that is so dominant here,” said Linda Fiddler. “We hope this endowment

will help achieve this.”
— Rob Meszaros is director of public affairs and communications at Cal State Bakersfield.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CSUB GEOLOGY DEPARTMENT

Former CSUB students, from left, Jason Robbins, Raquel Ramirez and JJ Navarette on a geology field study at Rainbow Canyon, south of Cuyama.